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PART VI

ORGANIZING THE WORK

CHAPTER XVII

RELIGION AND MAGIC IN ECONOMIC LIFE

The Nature of Economic Ritual.

THE fundamental Bemba beliefs in the powers of their ancestral spirits have already been referred to constantly, whether in relation to their political organization, their system of land tenure, or their general attitude towards the production and collection of food. But the ritual of their ancestor worship remains to be outlined, and in particular the part it plays in their whole economic life. The Bemba pray, or offer sacrifices, at all the chief events of the agricultural year such as tree-cutting, sowing, and harvest. Formerly this ceremonial seems to have been unusually rich and complex, especially that performed at the Paramount Chief's court. Nowadays the rites are carried out with diminishing ceremony, by fewer people, and often with great secrecy, owing to severe discouragement from some of the missionaries in the area. But the beliefs associated with these rites still seemed to me to dominate the people's thoughts and to affect their agricultural efforts, while the ceremonies themselves, even when temporarily abandoned, were often resumed at times of ill luck or catastrophe. They had still to be reckoned as one of the most important sanctions of the chief's authority, and were hence unfailingly performed at the latter's court.

For all these reasons it is important for our special purpose to estimate the function of these magico-religious practices in Bemba economic life and, consequently, the effect which their lapse is likely to have on the production of food in the territory as a whole. In a tribe living at this particular level of development it is chiefly human energy and purpose which makes the difference between failure and success, and ritual has often been described as one of the chief means by which the courage and industry of a primitive people is kept at its height. This pragmatic aspect of magic and religion was first emphasized by Malinowski in his analysis of

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Melanesian gardening and fishing.[1] Here he describes the series of magic acts which give confidence to the Trobriand fisherman embarking in a primitive vessel on a dangerous sea, or to the gardener about to start on the year's agricultural work. No less significant, in his view, is the function of an organized system of gardening magic in actually co-ordinating the activities of the whole community, since each individual waits for the appropriate ceremonial before beginning on his next agricultural task, and thus accepts the economic leadership of the gardening magician in charge. Radcliffe-Browne, in his study of a still more primitive community, that of the Andaman islanders, has also approached the question of ritual from a functional point of view.[2] He considers that the ceremonial associated with food production—the chief activity of each member of the society—not only impresses upon the individual the traditional tribal attitude towards this important pursuit, but also, as an additional function, gives a public affirmation of the unity of the group itself, a sentiment which is essential if successful economic co-operation is to be achieved.

Both these aspects of ritual seem to be apparent in the Bemba magico-religious system—the direct help which the rites give to the individual in his particular anxieties and difficulties, as well as their more indirect action in maintaining the confidence of the whole community and its sense of cohesion. From the purely economic point of view it is, of course, impossible to prove the pragmatic value of Bemba ceremonial in terms of increased agricultural output. Suffice it to say that in this area, as in the Trobriand islands, the rites seem to centre round those economic activities which give rise to the most doubts, fears, or anticipations among the people, itself a proof of the need they fulfil for each individual. For instance, the Bemba method of tree-cutting has been described as a pleasurable and exciting form of work, which the people consider very specially their own in contrast to the system of bush-clearing practised by neighbouring tribes. It is not surprising therefore that the annual *ukutema* ceremonies are reckoned as the most important of the whole year.[3] But this form

[1] Cf. 'Magic, Science, and Religion' in *Science, Religion and Reality*, edited by J. A. Needham, 1925, and *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, 1935.

[2] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, 1922.

[3] I cannot find another instance of a bush-clearing ceremony in the literature dealing with the other Bantu peoples, nor have we sufficiently detailed material

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of pollarding the trees is dangerous, if delightful, and the Bemba principles of land-selection by means of trees have been shown to be by no means infallible. Thus the gardener feels fear as well as keenness in approaching the tree-cutting. This emotional attitude is directly reflected in the rite itself. Every prayer I heard made on such an occasion contained some urgent request for safety for the tree-climber or for the blessing of the spirits on the selection of the new garden site. The people's attitude towards reaping is in striking contrast. When I asked an informant why the women did not pray before harvesting their millet, the idea seemed to him rather ridiculous. He merely laughed and said, 'Why should a person pray before reaping? Can a woman fall when she is standing on the ground? It is the man who climbs the trees who may fall. Let him call on the *imipashi* for help'—a clear expression of the different feeling of the community towards two essential economic activities.

Clearing the bush also marks the beginning of the new agricultural year when each gardener must plan the amount of ground he intends to cultivate. It is obviously important to the whole community that he should start his work with the highest ambitions and hopes. Here again it would be difficult to prove that the tree-cutting ritual actually does have this effect, except under modern conditions when it is possible to compare villages in which the rites are still observed and others in which they have been curtailed or abandoned. And I shall later give evidence to show that where chiefs were carrying out the traditional forms of worship, or had returned to them after a temporary lapse, the ceremony at the capital was the occasion of talk and enthusiastic comment in the surrounding district and, I think, really did act as a stimulus to further work.

Of the other important agricultural processes the firing of the piled branches is also considered an exciting moment in the economic cycle, but the act itself is, of course, not a dangerous one, nor is there much skill attached to it. It occurs, too, at the end of the hardest work of the season, and not at its beginning. We shall find that, though the firing of the branches is ritualized among the Bemba, the ceremony is a very simple one, and informants tend to omit it in accounts of the yearly cycle. Sowing ceremonies are still performed in all the chief's capitals, but they are tending to

from those areas to be certain whether the absence of such ceremonies is correlated with a less dangerous form of tree-cutting such as stumping, &c., or not.

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disappear in other villages. In any case they are restricted to the subsidiary crops, and do not affect the staple millet. In some Bantu tribes these sowing rites seem to mark the beginning of the year's new activities and are thus treated as very solemn occasions, but among the Bemba the *ukutema* rites quite overshadow those at the *ukubyala*—the blessing of the seeds.[1] There are no hoeing or fencing rites among the Bemba. Both of these are arduous and important activities, but they depend upon human effort for their success and not upon luck. Harvest, in any agricultural community, is associated with complex emotions. The new food supplies bring delight, gratitude to the giver, and fresh possibilities of social life. The pulse of the village is quickened. Dancing, beer-drinks, and quarrels begin. The filling of the granaries makes the calculation of future needs inevitable, and the careless must be taught the tribal attitude towards the careful storing and handling of food. There may be a justifiable fear that the supplies will not last the rest of the year—an apprehension reflected among the Bemba in the many forms of magic of durability (*icibyalilo*) already described (cf. pp. 206–8). Thus it is not surprising that firstfruit rites in this, as in other Bantu societies, play an important part in the people's economic life and rival the tree-cutting ceremonies in their complexity. We can see from this analysis of the annual cycle how the ritual associated with each successive economic process depends on the nature of the particular activity and on the emotions of pleasure, doubt, or anxiety which are usually aroused by it.

How far the economic ritual of the Bemba actually synchronizes their activities is a question that is harder to answer. Formerly the people used apparently to wait to cut trees, to fire their gardens, or to sow until the chief had prayed for the ancestral spirits' blessings. Now they no longer do so in most commoners' villages, except in the case of the firing of the branches when there is a strong practical reason for their doing so (cf. p. 295). It must be remembered too that gardening is not in any sense a communal activity among the Bemba. The whole village does not work together in the millet gardens, and there would, therefore, be little

[1] It is interesting to note that among the Bisa of Cilubi Island in the Bangweulu swamps, where tree-cutting has been abandoned, and a more or less fixed system of cultivation adopted, the bush-clearing rites have lapsed, but the sowing ceremonies seem to have gained correspondingly in importance.

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value in a complete co-ordination of every stage of their labour. But, nevertheless, the fact that each process of cultivation is preceded by its appropriate ceremony does act, I think, as a sign to laggards that the season, whether of bush-clearing or of sowing, has begun.[1] Further, since religious prerogatives are invariably combined with political authority, whether in the case of the headman, the sub-chief, or the chief, economic leadership inevitably falls to the man who officiates as priest at these annual ceremonies.

But this list does not exhaust the economic functions of the Bemba magico-religious ritual. Where the belief in the supernatural influence of the chiefs over the land is such an integral feature of politico-economic life, any social mechanism by which this faith is publically expressed and confirmed, is of fundamental importance from an agricultural point of view. In such circumstances, to believe in the chief is to cultivate in hope and in the assurance that the land is sure to yield its utmost, and these annual economic ceremonials, all directly controlled by the chief and addressed to his own ancestral spirits, are the occasions when his supernatural power is made manifest.

The rites themselves with their insistence on a hierarchical grading of status, give a public expression, as we shall see, to the whole system of political values on which food-production, land tenure, economic leadership, and the exploitation of tribal resources depends. And the Paramount's ability to organize a series of large and imposing ceremonies at his capital is considered a sign of the supernatural power he is able to wield. In fact, as will be shown, some of the ritual performed by the Citimukulu seems to exist to demonstrate this fact alone.

It is an interesting reflection of the highly centralized political system of the Bemba that the people rely almost entirely on the help of their ancestral spirits, and in particular, of course, that of the *imipashi* of the chiefs of the land in order to harvest their crops successfully. Magic is, relatively speaking, unimportant in their economic rites. The native makes a clear distinction between the magic and religious rite. He keeps the term *ubwanga* to mean the use of charms, usually parts of trees or shrubs handled in a traditional

[1] Members of the White Fathers Mission have told me that in the area round their Missions the departure of preachers on their Christmas tour round the villages is often taken in the same way as a sign that the later sowing of millet should begin.

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way[1] and prepared by a specialist *nganga*, from whom its use may be bought. *Bwanga* is used by the individual to protect himself from hostile forces, such as sorcery. He uses charms to increase the lasting power of the food in his gardens or granary (*icibyalilo*). He occasionally purchases counter-magic if he suspects a sorcerer of bewitching his millet store. Now and then I have seen charms put in gardens as a protection against birds or thieves. But, compared to some of the neighbouring tribes, the Bemba resort to economic magic rarely.[2] It is never used in tribal rites or by the chief in his capacity of priest of the tribe. It can never affect the productivity of the whole land as distinct from the individual garden. All public prayers and ceremonies are addressed to the ancestral spirits, and it is significant that the chief himself is not expected to use charms at all as far as his crops are concerned. 'Why should Citimukulu use *icibyalilo* like a commoner does?' said the official in charge of the chief's gardens. 'Hasn't he prayed to the chiefs of the land to give him food?' This statement seemed to me to be significant.[3]

This preliminary account shows us, I think, how the religious rites of the Bemba must have integrated tribal food production formerly and stimulated hard work. We must now proceed to a more detailed description of the ritual itself and estimate more exactly the part it still plays at the present day.

The spirit centres. The *imipashi* of the Bemba are approached in certain well-defined ways—calling on the names of the ancestors, usually at the same time spitting in the air (*ukupala mate*); prayers uttered by priests usually at one of the many shrines throughout the territory (*ukulumbula*)—and the offering of some material object such as cloth, flour, beer, chickens, sheep, or cattle to the spirits (*ukupepa*). The spirit centres at which the *imipashi* are invoked can be arranged in the order of their sacredness. They include:

[1] Often with the addition of a metal or part of an animal as an activating principle (*icishimba*).

[2] The neighbouring Bisa of Cilubi Island, for instance, invariably used protective magic against thefts in their cassava gardens, and Doke describes many of the same kind of charms among the Lamba (op. cit., pp. 294–5). Whether this greater reliance on magic is associated with a less powerful belief in the chief I do not know.

[3] The supernatural functions of some S. African chiefs differ in this respect, since the Zulu, Swazi, and Tschwana chiefs owe much of their power to the possession of rain magic, and many of the S. African chiefs are 'doctored' magically at the beginning of their reign and at subsequent ceremonies.

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769 796 178 rite was connected with one of the most sacred of the Paramount's *babenye*, a girdle made of the skin cut from the abdomen of a legendary figure, Mwase, said to have been killed for committing adultery with the Citimukulu's wife. It has now long since rotted away, but living men tell of occasions when the relic was taken from the *benye* house, bound round the waist of a young virgin, the maternal niece of Munuca, the greatest *mukabilo*. The girl then danced across the garden of the chief, scattering blessed sorghum seeds broadcast, while the Citimukulu and his *bakabilo* followed behind. This story, always told with great delight, seemed to me a sign that the sowing rites must have had greater importance formerly than at the present day.

768 796 241 Nowadays, the blessing of the seeds at a commoner's village is done in typical fashion by standing them in a calabash at the end of the headman's bed. In the morning, after the usual purification ceremony, they are sown in the headman's garden, all the villagers coming to help.[1] But I never saw such a rite performed myself, and I noticed that some natives were doubtful as to which seeds actually had to be blessed. For instance, of 10 informants, all gave pumpkins in their list, 8 Livingstone potatoes, 7 Kaffir corn, 6 maize, 5 *amankolobwe*. At the capitals, however, the sowing rites still persist. At Nkula's village in 1930 Kaffir-corn seeds in a huge gourd were stood overnight in the *benye* house and were sown next day on the chief's *mputa* by all the women of the village. The sowing ceremonies evidently used to give the people a sign when to start planting their crops, a matter on which skilled guidance is often needed, but it is doubtful whether they were ever occasions of big tribal gatherings of rejoicing as in the case of tree-cutting or harvest rites.

769 796 171 182 (*d*) *First-fruit ceremonies*. Some form of first-fruits ceremony seems to be performed in all typical Bantu societies, and in these there are certain common elements recognizable. But the symbolism of these rites is often exceedingly complex, and varies widely from area to area. The ceremonies also tend to become the occasion of big tribal gatherings such as the army rites of the Zulu since they inevitably occur at the plentiful season of the

[1] One informant told me his father, a headman, always blessed the seeds of all the villagers and gave them each a handful to mix with their crops, but in most instances now it seems that the headman merely blesses and sows his own seeds. In Bisa districts, such as that near Shiwa Dandu, the original form of the rite seems to be more often adhered to.

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year. This combination of functions makes the question of interpretation even more difficult.

Some writers have described the ceremonies as being essentially a ritual which marks the change of the season and the beginning of new forms of social activity. Thus Bryant calls the Zulu rite *umkosi*, 'the stepping into the year', and Junod describes the complex *luma* ceremonies of the Thonga as typical *rites de passage*.[1] Of course, the harvest in any of these societies does actually mean a complete change in ordinary village life, but among the Bemba I heard no specific statement of this fact in any of the explanations of the ritual, nor is there any great ceremony of public rejoicing at the time except on occasions when a special harvest rite is carried out at the capital, or when the *ulupepo lukalamba* has been initiated. But the element of risk, thought to be associated with the beginning of the new food-supply, is prominent here as it is in other Bantu societies. The Thonga, according to Junod, consider that there is some magic danger attached to the eating of the new grain, and the name of the ceremony—*luma*—comes from *ukuluma*, 'to bite'. He suggests the taboo on the new food may be due, in part, to fear of quarrelling—which is an actual risk when beer starts to flow freely—or to a desire to avoid jealousy by preventing one man from beginning his new supplies before his neighbours are able to do so.[2] The doctoring of the chief against this danger of eating the new foods and the various rites designed to remove the taboo on the new harvest occur again and again throughout this southern area.

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Among the Bemba I never heard a native state that there was any magic danger attached to eating the new food, and the name of the rite, *ukuposela* (to offer or place in front of some one), describes the essential element in their first-fruits—the recognition of the prerogatives of chief and ancestral spirits which will be described below. But it is evidently considered important that each crop should be ritually treated immediately the first specimen in any district ripens. There is no waiting till the end of the harvest for the ceremony. In fact it is reckoned so necessary to

[1] A. T. Bryant, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, 1905; H. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, 1929, vol. i, pp. 394–404.

[2] Cf. Junod, loc. cit., p. 394. *Report of the Commission on Native Law and Custom*, 1883, pp. 525–6 and 531–2. Cf. also M. Gluckmann, 'First-fruit Ceremonies of South-Eastern Bantu', *Africa*, vol. xi, no. 1, p. 34, for stress on the danger of quarrelling at harvest, and for other interesting interpretations of the Zulu ritual.

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value'. But in Bemba society the ritual stress on the legal and political prerogatives of the chief is also prominent at the first-fruits ceremonies, and the harvest, as well as the tree-cutting, can be made the occasion of a big display of the Paramount's power.

(*f*) *Rain ritual.* Prayers for rain are rarely necessary in this area as the supply is usually ample, but when they occur the Citimukulu is alone responsible. I never heard of a territorial chief or a headman praying for rain, or an *yanga* asked to provide it by magic. The only means of obtaining rain is apparently to send an ox to the chiefs' burial grove in charge of one of the royal undertakers, and the ShiMwalule there sacrifices the beast at the shrine in the grove. One such sacrifice was apparently performed in 1930.

To conclude, the magico-religious rites of the Bemba were certainly an integral part of their whole economic system. The ceremonies gave an impetus to their ordinary agricultural activities, and enabled the chief to organize their efforts more effectively, and thus to support the whole machinery of tribal government. The performance of the ritual constantly emphasized the supernatural powers of the chief, both in his own person and by his right of access to the tribal spirits. On this deeply-seated belief in the attributes of their *mfumu*, economic incentives and the use of land ultimately depended. It is this faith which has been weakened nowadays with pronounced effects on the whole morale of the tribe, as far as agriculture is concerned. How far Christian ritual has taken the place of the old agricultural ceremonies I do not know. I have seen natives cross themselves before tree-cutting and sowing, and I believe that some missions hold church services for the blessing of the seeds, but it will remain a fact that the old Bemba ceremonial of ancestor worship put the control of the religious rites into the hands of the political and administrative authority of the tribe, while those of the Christian churches do not, and cannot, do the same, since no big chiefs have yet accepted Christianity.

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duties, most of which are represented in mime. It gives magic protection to the parties concerned.

How far does the ceremony express other tribal beliefs and values? The following diagrams attempt to show the relation of certain characteristic features of Bemba culture, as it is described in Part I, to the chisungu and to other ceremonies which go to form the ritual pattern of this tribe.

The most important of these ritual series are three in number, if importance is judged, as I think it should be, by the length and complexity of the rites and the time and interest shown in them. The first of these ritual series is the ceremonial surrounding chieftainship—the long and arduous rites of royal burial, the almost equally protracted and complicated ceremonies for the installation of a great chief, and those for the building of his new village and his sacred relic huts. The second is the series of economic rites carried out at the clearing of the bush, the firing of the piled branches on the cleared site, the sowing of the seeds, and the harvesting and first fruits—and in the old days those concerned with war. The third comprises the chisungu ceremonies themselves.

The ritual pattern in all these ceremonies is based on an essentially homogenous body of beliefs—that is to say the dogma which links authority with the exercise of supernatural power based on access to ancestral spirits by those who have correctly handled sex and fire. In order to secure blessings in war, for tree-cutting, sowing, first-fruits, the filling of the granaries and for good weather, human fertility, harmonious relations in the village or a successful reign for the paramount chief, those in authority must have ceremonial intercourse with their head wives and then light new fire.[1] The same must be done when a new role is assumed, when, for example, a chief is installed or a girl made nubile, or a couple married. Such people are separated from the rest of the community and restored to it after an act of ceremonial intercourse —the lighting of new fire, the touching of the lips of the aspirants to the new role with a particle of food cooked on the new fire,[2] and their presentation to the community for congratulation and

[1] The economic rites are described fully in my *Land, Labour and Diet in N. Rhodesia*, 1939.

[2] *Ukubalishya* or *ukubapo kakale*.

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	Special features	*Dogma*
Environment and activities	Shifting cultivation with annual food shortage.	*Security* through chief's supernatural powers; kept potent by sex-fire taboos. *Security* through magic of food production, storage and division. *Security* through conduct pleasing to ancestors.
	Hunting and fishing.	As above.
	Domestic activities.	Women only can cook and must do so on a 'pure' fire.
	Absence of storable wealth.	*Security* through social ties with those who will share work and food.
	High infant and maternal mortality.	*Security* through sex-fire taboos, protective magic, conduct pleasing to ancestors.
Social structure (a) Authority system.	Hierarchical order of govt. (Paramount, chiefs, headmen). Authority based on descent and seniority among men and women.	Observance of hierarchy brings supernatural blessing. Chiefs and ancestors help their inferiors if treated properly. Respect to senior women brings help in childbirth.
(b) Descent system.	*Matrilineal descent* and succession. (Conflict between father and mother's brother.)	Belief that children produced from women's blood; activated only by semen and ancestral spirit. Belief that father's sister can cause sterility by cursing.

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Expression in chisungu rites	*Expression in other rites*
Mimetic rites giving girl her fire and marriage pot, and initiating sex-fire taboos. Mimetic rites representing gardening duties; ritual cooking of seeds and distribution.	*Chief's accession* ceremonies give him entry to ancestral shrines. *Chief's marriage* gives him marriage pot. *Rites of protection* from impure fires, unregulated sex, death. *Agricultural rites.* Sowing, first fruits, tree-cutting.
Mime of fish traps. Mime of hunting in wood. Mime of bow and arrow ceremony.	*Chiefs* or headmen bless fish poisoning. Ritual round chief's bow.
Mimes of domestic activities and protection of fire.	
Mime of feasting of son-in-law, and ritual food division.	Rites of blessing granaries; magic expansion of granaries.
Girl initiated into sex-fire ritual; fertility rites	Protective magic for infants and those in childbirth. Chief's blessings. Ancestral rites.
Songs and *mbusa* about chiefs. Headman spits ancestral blessings on girls. Constant miming of respect to elders in food and other offerings. *Mbusa*, the things handed down from the ancestors.	Hierarchical order of chiefs' rites (Paramount followed by chiefs, headmen). Seniority expressed in ritual precedence.
Brother and sister figure modelled. Mothers hand on child-bearing to children. (River ceremony.) Father's sister makes the girl's new fire.	Shrines to apical ancestress, of royal line. Shrines to maternal ancestors. Functions of clans in court ritual. Functions of reciprocal clans.

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	Special Features	*Dogma*
(*c*) Marriage and family.	Husband and wife mystically related. Husband and wife's obligations.	Belief that man and woman mystically related in marriage. Sex in marriage potent and a source of blessings or danger. First intercourse dangerous.
	Marriage. Uxorilocal becoming virilocal. Husband gradually incorporated in wife's group. Tensions of early years.	
(*d*) Village grouping	Village composed of relatives headman has persuaded to join him. Frequent changes in composition.	Village blessed by headman's ancestors; made 'hot' or 'cold' by his sex activities; protected from dissension by magic.
(*e*) Age grouping	Seniority in all activities based on age. Women's grouping in family and village by age.	Ancestors bless those who respect seniority.
Some salient values.	Fertility very highly valued.	Fertility secured through blessings of ancestors and chiefs and senior relatives, especially father's sister. Fertility also secured through magic and protection against witchcraft. Successful childbirth through keeping marriage rites.
	Desire to build up village, following, subjects.	The blessing of ancestors brings a large community. Magic rites can also produce it.

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Expression in chisungu rites	*Expression in other rites*
Girl protected from dangers of first intercourse: taught way of safety by seniors; given her marriage pot; taught to hide things of house. Miming of husband's duties by mock bridegrooms. Pottery images of husband's and wife's duties.	Ceremonies surround chief's relation with his head wife. Chief's marriage rites.
Miming of stages of incorporation of husband bridegroom. Honouring of husband. Washing his hands.	
Headman blesses girls before and after ceremony; girl given fire.	Ordeals to determine success of new village site; blessings of ancestral spirits through headman: ritual initiation of headman's fire; building of ancestral shrines; magic protection against illness.
Constant miming of women's seniority by age; Girls humiliated by older women in return for initiation; Girls make obeisance to every householder in village.	Ancestors called on in order of seniority: first fruits tasted in order of seniority.
Numerous fertility symbols: Bridegroom honoured for virility and represented as magician; rite of 'begging for parenthood'; girl handed on parenthood by her mother.	Chiefs pray for fertility of land and women at all ceremonies.
Miming of food division and cooking. Magic of attracting guests.	Headman's prayers for increase of village and magic rites for this purpose.

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admonition, as in the ceremony of *ukushikula* after marriage or the installation of a new chief or chieftainess. The same words are used for all these constituent ritual acts, and it would be difficult for a passer-by to distinguish one rite from another.

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This fact surely accounts for the importance of the chisungu rite in Bemba culture. It is the occasion on which the girl is given her fire and her marriage pot and made responsible for their care and their use. On her handling of the hearth depends her husband's power of access to his ancestral spirits or, if she be married to a headman or chief, the blessings which are available for gardens, bush and village, political life and warfare. A glance at the chart will show that except for individual magic rites, there are no ceremonies in the last column which do not, in the last resource, depend on the chisungu or on the abbreviated forms of puberty ceremony now carried out instead. The supernatural powers of the Citimukulu and his brother chiefs are directly pivoted on the chisungu and its magic and didactic acts; this purely feminine rite is therefore essential to the welfare of the whole tribe.[1]

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The chisungu can also be considered of importance to the maintenance of tribal traditions, because of its direct emphasis on 'things handed down'. The *mbusa* are referred to specifically in this way and this is said to be their value. The central act of an economic rite is a prayer and supplication to the ancestors when the officiant asks for what is wanted, blessings on the seeds for instance, or peace. He asks for them from beings who will not always grant these requests. The words are uttered spontaneously and the sentences have no very fixed form. They mention individual ancestors by name, vary the terms of address, and add a number of immediate and special requests as well as the more usual demands for blessings and fertility. For instance a headman offering the first fruits to the ancestor was heard to add at the end of his discourse a fervent appeal that I might not miss when I went out shooting, as I had on the previous day.

The defined elements here are the time and method of approach to the ancestors and the status and position of the officiant. With

[1] This suggests a hypothesis for comparative research. If my interpretation of the importance of the chisungu is correct a similar emphasis on instruction and care in handling fire will be found wherever the chief's supernatural power is thought to be closely linked to it. This question will be discussed.

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these conditions fixed there is a wide range of possible wants that can be voiced, meeting the need of the moment or of the group or the person concerned. These are rites of supplication in which the Bemba voice their needs and try to persuade themselves that they will be fulfilled.

In the chisungu however the women do not voice new desires, but always those that have existed in the past. The rites consist of an intricate succession of acts the value of which lies in more or less exact repetition. The *mbusa* must be made in the same way and the pottery models on the floor cannot be altered. These are rites which represent and proclaim the established rather than ones which enable the performers to meet new needs. The mimes and emblems of these initiation rites form a charter for the transfer of roles that have to be constantly assumed in each generation. They do not grant the men or women who perform them any help in the present troubles of Bemba married life, such as the prolonged absence of men from the tribal areas or the growing divorce rate. There is no element in them of supplication or prayer. It is for this reason that the chisungu must be reckoned as a rite of maintenance of tribal traditions.

To turn again to the chart it will be seen that all the major rituals of the Bemba reflect the importance they attach to fertility and the supply of food. The chisungu is more closely concerned with fertility than rites of supplication performed by chiefs, yet I never heard a prayer uttered by a chief which did not contain a special appeal to the ancestors for parenthood (*bufyashi*). The cycle of agricultural ceremonies is one of the most important tasks the chiefs are responsible for. The links between the three sets of rites are here close.

It is not easy to account for the tremendous emphasis on fertility and the care of children in Bemba culture. The desire is likely to be strong in all societies where social structure is largely based on descent and groups can only be enlarged by the birth of new children. There are, however, many African tribes with similar social structures in which the emphasis on fertility does not seem to be ritualized in this pronounced way. But it must be remembered that in Bemba culture the lack of any permanent form of possessions makes rights over labour—here rights over the

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labour of the younger generation—of particular importance. There may also be a correlation between fertility rites and matrilineal descent and in fact such a correlation seems to hold good in Central Africa (see Appendix A). Bemba believe that the child is entirely formed from the physical contribution of the mother and not the father, and similar beliefs may hold in the other matrilineal tribes in the area. It is moreover common to find in primitive society that the woman is regarded as solely responsible for the failure of a couple to produce children. Impotence in man is recognized but not sterility. In patrilineal Bantu societies it is common practice for the man's agnatic kinsmen to provide bride-wealth for him to secure him a wife. If she proves barren the cattle or other objects are commonly returned or another girl provided from the same lineage group. In a matrilineal society of the Bemba type the situation is rather different. The children of a marriage belong legally to the girl's family and it is to their gain if she produces children. This fact may account for the great care and attention given to fertility rites for girls among such people. The correlation of matrilineal descent with an emphasis on fertility is a hypothesis which will have to be tested more carefully in other areas. It would, of course be possible to relate the high infantile mortality rate that exists among the Bemba to their desire for children and their anxiety over them. This is in fact what many Bemba do. I have for instance been told in answer to a challenging question of mine about the protective rites performed for children. 'Well! Just look what a lot of our children die'. However, high infantile mortality rates are too common in Bantu society for this to be more than a contributory cause to the desire for fertility.

The salient features of Bemba social structure are also reflected in this ritual. The characteristic attitudes to authority in this very hierarchical society are expressed in ceremonies by which chiefs are created and maintained in their supernatural powers, and in those economic and other ceremonies performed by the chiefs themselves. The chisungu is not specially concerned with political life although some of the pottery emblems 'teach' the girl to honour the chiefs.

However, the hierarchy based on age, which is also characteristic of every type of structured relationship among the Bemba, is

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one of those which is frequently symbolized in the chisungu by the offering of food in order of age; by acts of obeisance to seniors; by the singing over and over again of the song about the immutability of precedence based on age, which runs 'The arm-pit cannot be higher than the shoulder'. The girl's proper conduct is expressed in the phrase 'be submissive, or make yourself soft and pliant before your elders' (*ukunakila kubakalamba*).

There is in fact a greater expression of the principle of precedence by age in the chisungu than in the chiefly rites themselves. This may be due to the fact that all rites of role assumption naturally give importance to age since it is those who have already assumed the senior role who can hand it on to the juniors. It is also true that Bemba girls are not removed from their own family to be put under the control of their mothers-in-law as in a patrilineal society, but they are placed under the authority of different older women in their own and other villages. Some of these are related to the girls and some are not. It must be remembered too that the chisungu is a public ceremony given over to teaching while most of the chiefly rites are done in secret and people merely assume that they have been correctly carried out.

Turning now to the social groups based on descent, it is worth noting that there is very little ritual expression of clan or lineage unity in the chisungu in spite of the fact that it deals with marriage and procreation. The principle of matrilineal descent is very strongly held here in spite of the domestic authority the father manages to win, which is greater than that reported from other matrilineal peoples in the area such as the Yao. The dogma as to the nature of biological descent was never questioned during my visit or the belief that the woman was responsible for the production of the child.[1] Exogamy rules within the clan are carefully kept, and clan greetings used. Yet although in some Bantu societies clan and lineage precedence is expressed in first-fruit ceremonies and members of different clans sit apart in clearly marked groups at tribal rites, in Lubemba there is no ritual ex-

[1] I quote in my article on the Bemba in *African Political Systems* edited by E. E. Evans-Pritchard and M. Fortes, 1939, (p. 97) an amazed comment made by a patrilineal Ngoni about Bemba beliefs on the subject: 'If I have a bag and put money in it, the money belongs to me. But the Bemba say a man puts semen into a woman and yet the children belong to the woman, not to the man.'

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pression of this principle of social grouping beyond the precedence given at the court to the descendants of certain clans who accompanied the first Citimukulu to the present territory, and some ritual duties based on clan membership. In the chisungu however, it is the family which is emphasized and not the lineage. It must be recalled that the Bemba boy provides his own small token payments at marriage and does service for his father-in-law. His maternal relatives do not often help him and they are not economically interested in the success of the marriage as are bride's relatives among the patrilineal Southern Bantu. The boy himself is making an individual contract with all his wife's relatives. The girl's father and mother and the father's sister are the main actors in the ceremony and the father is the potential head of the extended family which will be based on uxorilocal residence.

Further, the clan and lineage have no political functions as corporate groups except in the case of the royal dynasty. It might therefore be concluded that ceremonies for expressing corporate feeling are not necessary. It might be equally well concluded that the ceremonies connected with chiefs' succession do in fact portray the principles of matrilineal descent and that the chisungu emphasizes the girl's duty to bear children for her maternal relatives. These suggestions should be tested in other matrilineal societies.

It seems clear that the maintenance of a stable family group is a difficult matter among the Bemba. There is the desire of the girl to stay with her own people which is opposed to that of the boy who wishes to return to his, and there are no economic links to bind them to one village rather than another. This type of contract may account for the chisungu ritual which stresses the link between husband and wife; the supernatural sanctions against adultery; and the constant admonishment of the girl to submit to her husband, to give him honour and also to give honour and food to her in-laws. The series of presentations of food to the son-in-law might also be listed as part of the whole process of winning the young bridegroom and persuading him to stay in his wife's village.

To conclude, Bemba chieftainship rites express a number of beliefs that are common to the chisungu such as the sex-fire-blood association and the link between political authority and the ac-

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cess to ancestors. They combine to stress the importance of fertility, children, food, respect for authority based on descent and age, and the need to build up village communities. With these common beliefs and values each series of ritual acts has its own emphasis. The ceremonies run by men include the care of chiefly relic shrines and the passing on of ancestral spirits to the chief; those run by women involve the care of the chisungu emblems and the passing of the nubile status to the girl.

The reiteration of the same message in a series of different ceremonies is perhaps only to be expected in view of the tendency of all elaborate ritual to develop multiple purposes. If we classify the activities or social relationships round which religion and magic centre the connection between the chisungu and the whole ritual pattern of the Bemba will become even clearer.

Religious and magic ceremonies tend to be associated with:

(*a*) *Natural environment*, e.g. Worship or personification of sun, moon, stars; shrines at unusual objects (waterfalls, mountains, rocks); personification of wild animals or plants; magic properties associated with animals or plants. (Chisungu ceremonies distinguish between bush and village and use bush magic.)

(*b*) *Economic activities*. Agricultural, hunting, fishing, pastoral, care of the granary, etc., ceremonies. Rites of supplication to supernatural powers or magic acts—Sacralization of particular domestic animals or plants—Ethical norms. (Chisungu represents agricultural and domestic activities and crops grown by women; magic rites related to agriculture and ethical norms.)

(*c*) *Biological processes*. Sacralization of biological processes of birth, sex, food, health, ill-health, death. (Chisungu is a puberty, nubility and fertility rite with religious and magic aspects, and expounds ethical rules.)

Social structure

(i) *Maturation rites of assumption*. Maturation rites for assumption of age status or entry to age grades; rites of role assumption, e.g. installation of chiefs; initiation of diviners; assumption of roles of husband and wife: Ethical behaviours expected of role holders.

(Chisungu is a rite of social maturation and role assumption;

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employs magic of growth and tests of social maturation; and expounds the ethics expected of married women.)

(ii) *Social relationships.* Contracting social relationships, e.g. marriage, adoption, clan membership, legitimacy rites, reconciliation ceremonies; expressing relationships, e.g. ritual expression of duties of father, mother's brother or other kinsmen; ending relations, e.g. ritual expulsion from clan, removal of death from widower.

Magic of social relationships, e.g. Success magic; beauty or popularity magic; witchcraft and sorcery; Ethics of social relations.

(Chisungu contracts marriage relationships; expresses rights of father, mother and father's sister; expresses the relationship of brother and sister; expounds the ethical rules of kinship.)

(iii) *Social groups.* Rites of maintaining or expressing group structure, or expressing corporate obligations, e.g. Clan ceremonies, ancestor worship, chiefly ceremonies; representation of precedence;

Ethics of citizenship. (Chisungu expresses precedence based in age and authority in the women's group.)

(iv) *Ultimate beliefs and values.* In the sense of dogma as to the afterworld, transmigration of souls, beliefs as to union with supernatural, e.g. aspects of mortuary ritual and ancestor worship; trances, dreams, asceticism, mysticism. (Chisungu shows no traces.)

The chisungu is a form of puberty ritual, so, as suggested in the Introduction, it inevitably has a double focus since it is made to represent the attainment of sexual and social maturity alike. But it has many other aspects as well and is linked with nearly every occasion or relationship which is sacralized in Bemba society, as the chart shows.

The chisungu uses certain ritual devices and not others in this list of religious and magic activities.

Even such a summary classification of ritual practices as is given here, shows, firstly, they are used to control what is uncontrollable by rational means (the rain that will not fall, the crops that yield poorly, the husband who will not love his wife, the new chief who may or may not have the personal authority necessary to

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command) and that control is secured according to the people's belief either by supplication, the exact use of magic formulae or good behaviour. Secondly, they are used to maintain and perpetuate systems of social relationship and the structure of groups. They act as charters to maintain the power of those who already exercise it and express the moral rules on which the social structure depends. Lastly, they may provide the individual with spiritual experiences and represent the tribal philosophy or view of the world.

The chisungu, as I have explained, makes little use of supplication to or worship of supernatural beings, but great use of the exact performance of ritual acts and elaborate symbolism and of magic formulae and substances. The way in which these mechanisms are used will be discussed later.

UNCONSCIOUS TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS

I have already referred to some recent attempts to interpret ritual in terms of emotional conflicts, whether conscious or unconscious (cf. pp. 118–9). Some of the tensions connected with puberty can be said to be universal, since they are inherent in the ways in which human beings grow, reproduce themselves, and rear the children born to them. Examples of some of these common emotional attitudes are mentioned in the introduction to this book.

Psycho-analysts will also notice many universal symbols in the chisungu ceremony. The serpent and other animal symbols are of wide distribution. So are the mimetic representations of journeys through dark and difficult places to reach knowledge and safety. Such imagery commonly occurs in dreams. The frequent oral handling of the *mbusa* and other objects in the chisungu may also be significant from a psycho-analytical point of view. However, since no study of the symbolism in Bemba dreams or other revelations of their unconscious fantasies has ever been made this is merely a presumption.

Anthropologists, as distinct from psycho-analysts, tend to be more interested in the emotional conflicts produced by the charac-

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the widespread use of protective magic which is, I believe, the important practical issue. In an atmosphere of suspicion and hatred, natives will believe themselves forced to buy charms from the reputable *yanga* of the neighbourhood, or very commonly from a witch-doctor of another tribe, to protect themselves (*kufilika mubili*), such charms being naturally viewed with alarm by others. In such an atmosphere of mistrust, too, ordinary magic of success, hunting, and agricultural charms, or those for luck in personal relations, such as formed the bulk of the horns on our heap, assume a sinister aspect. Beauty magic bought by a young unmarried girl is not a dangerous possession, but the same charm purchased by one of two jealous co-wives would be considered a hostile act. All magic of luck and self-protection becomes dangerous, that is to say, just in so far as the success it brings is believed to hurt another. Protective magic, like protective armaments, increases the sense of insecurity it was bought to end. Herein lies the danger, especially as contact with white civilization has, in many cases, actually increased the use of such charms and counter-charms.

A little consideration will in fact show us, what is not at first sight evident, that a change in the native belief in sorcery inevitably follows changes in social structure. The strength of the fear of witchcraft in any community obviously depends on the nature of its tribal institutions.

It is clear that the strength of the belief in the power of sorcery in any community depends on the nature of its tribal institutions and, in particular, the type of authority exercised, and its legal machinery. Its incidence will vary with its system of social grouping, local or kinship, and the absence or presence of emotional tension between these groups. To explain by a contrast between two widely different cultures, the Trobriand Islander is afraid his chief may bewitch him, and hence magic acts in this community as a conservative force backing up his authority. Witchcraft has its appointed place in the whole political system. The Mubemba, living under a far more autocratic and powerful chief, says simply, 'Why should a chief bewitch a commoner since he can so easily beat him or mutilate him?' Evans-Pritchard, in fact, suggests that we shall find an interesting correlation between the morphology of magic and the type of political system in a primitive society.[1]

[1] Evans-Pritchard, 'The Morphology and Function of Magic', *American Anthropologist*, Oct. 1929.

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754 The presence or absence of legal machinery for settling grievances obviously also affects the incidence of magic throughout the society. ● 182 The Melanesian often has no way of venting his grievance against his 121 fellows except by the practice of the magic of hate. The Mubemba, in common with most other Bantu peoples, can obtain redress in a legal court. He brings a case where the former would besiege the sorcerer for more and more spells.

Again there are patterns of culture in which two social groups are legally bound together in a network of obligations mutually burdensome, and providing perpetual cause for emotional tension. Two individuals may be placed by society in a position of constant rivalry from the start. In such an atmosphere suspicion and charges of witchcraft flourish. I will instance only from the same two Melanesian societies, the relation in Trobriand matrilineal society between a man's heir, his maternal nephew, and his son; or in Dobu the hostility between the groups united in marriage (*susu*) between which the fear of witchcraft is an absolutely dominating dread. Among the Babemba differences in the marriage and kinship system do not provide groupings with interests so sharply contrasted, although the co-wives in a society where the women have never really accepted polygamy as an institution, or the rival heirs to great chieftainships, are always suspected of bewitching each other. But I believe conflicting elements in the society have lately increased.

This is, in fact, the crux of the whole matter. Missionaries all over Africa are teaching a religion which casts out fear, but economic and social changes have so shattered tribal institutions and moral codes that the result of white contact is in many cases an actual increase in the dread of witchcraft, and therefore in the whole incidence of magic throughout the group.

754 In Bemba society the position of the chief has materially altered. 182 One of his functions was formerly the administration of the poison 121 ordeal (*mwafi*) to those accused of sorcery, and this gave an ultimate sense of security to the community at large. Now he no longer per- 622 forms this duty, and his subjects know, moreover, that they cannot charge a witch in a legal court, black or white. 'No one will help us now', said an informant about the *Bamwapi* movement, 'unless we help ourselves.' It must be remembered, too, that divination, itself an

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essential part of the native system of fixing guilt, can no longer be publicly practised. It exists, but is discredited, and in this transition stage its loss has certainly robbed the native of some of his old moral certainties.

Further, with alterations in the sanctions for the power of the chief —his wealth, military supremacy, and the belief in his supernatural powers—that attitude to authority, on which, as we saw, tribal morality so largely depended, has been rudely shaken, and with it the whole system of beliefs in supernatural punishment for wrong-doing. Some natives are abandoning tribal rules because they find them burdensome; and some are living in conditions where it is impossible to carry them out—perhaps working at a mine too far to be able to care for their kinsmen or to carry out certain religious rites. Other natives again, many of them Christians, are caught between clashing moralities. In either case the majority are suffering, I believe, from a perpetual sense of guilt, expressing itself in a constant anxiety for some kind of supernatural defence. Nowhere did I feel this more strongly than in the most civilized part of Northern Rhodesia, the copper belt. Here a Bemba woman no longer feels it necessary to keep the wearisome taboos for the protection of her household fire, but just for that reason she feels herself bound to pay as much as she can for protective charms to save the life of her child—'just in case'. The influence of wage-earning is here again all-powerful. Money seems to the urban native his only asset in this insecure world. By it he can in effect exchange a belief in a system of ancestral spirits who demand respect, the performance of exacting ceremonial, and the keeping of tribal morality for safety bought on a hard cash basis open to all who have money, whatever their position in the society. What wonder, then, that he rushes to the seller of charms? And wherever protective magic is freely bought and sold there is an atmosphere of mutual suspicion between individuals. The fear of witchcraft increases, and witch-finders flourish.

Again, social grouping has been altered by white contact, with, as a transition stage, new causes of hostility between the individual components. In villages near European settlements, natives from other areas have intruded on original kinship units because they want to live near their work. 'We don't feel safe in this village. There are so many strangers here', an old woman said to me in a village near

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754 Kasama. In the mines it is the tribal admixture which is, I believe, at
182 the basis of the natives' positive obsession by the fear of witchcraft.
121 Each tribe credits the other with absolutely diabolical powers.
171 Paralysed by the fear of the unknown, what can they do but buy more charms? Moreover, wage-earning in a large industrial undertaking provides opportunity for advance through individual initiative, and hence jealousy is rife. I know few successful clerks raised above the heads of their fellows who have not been accused at one time or another of sorcery. 'How else did he gain the bwana's favour?' is the natural question. And it is in the ranks of such men that, paradoxically enough, the most money is spent in the purchase of protective charms. I know of one ex-Government clerk in the Kasama area who had spent a Government bonus of £15 on the purchase of protective magic from a neighbouring tribe. Jealousy of the man who has adapted himself more quickly than his fellows to Europeanism is, I believe, inevitable in this transition stage.

781 Here, then, we must leave our study of the *Bamusapi* movement. We
121 have seen that part of the success of these charlatans was due to their
754 clever blend of the old and the new, and I believe that such a combination will be almost invariably found in modern witch-finder move-
789 ments. Added to this we must reckon the cleverness of a technique that drew from a village its harmless as well as its dangerous horns, and by the multiplicity of charms thus produced increased the sense of the risk the whole community had run. An analysis of the horns collected led us to doubt the existence of sorcerers proper in the community, a doubt confirmed by a study of Bemba belief as to the supernatural causes of death and disaster. But native belief in witchcraft, and the widespread use of protective magic and counter-charms of all kinds, was confirmed. This latter I believe to have been actually increased by contact with the white civilization, and the resultant economic and social changes in Northern Rhodesia. Hence follows the success of modern movements of witch-finders, movements which are, I believe, inevitable as a product of violent changes in tribal organization and belief.

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